

# Facts for Consumers

## Closet Cues: Care Labels and Your Clothes



Federal Trade Commission  
Bureau of Consumer Protection  
Office of Consumer & Business Education  
(202) 326-3650

July 1997

Your favorite sweater shrank, your new pants puckered, and the colors in your designer shirt ran. You're furious.

Don't toss the clothes out just yet. If you followed the cleaning instructions on the care labels, you can return the garments and ask the retailer for an exchange or a refund.

Under the Federal Trade Commission's Care Labeling Rule, manufacturers must tag their clothing with at least one safe cleaning method. Garments sold without a care label — or with inaccurate cleaning instructions — may violate the Rule. Beginning July 1, 1997, manufacturers *may* use certain care symbols in place of words on labels. To help consumers understand the new symbols, the FTC says manufacturers must include written explanations of those symbols on hang tags or elsewhere on garments for the next 18 months. The chart on page 5 decodes the new symbols.

This brochure explains the Rule, the new care symbols, and what to do if your clothes end up damaged — even after you've followed the care instructions.

### When Is a Label Required?

Care labels are required on most textile clothing. They are *not* required on clothing made primarily of suede or leather, footwear, items for the head and hands — such as hats and gloves — or on household items like sheets and towels. However, many manufacturers of these items provide care information voluntarily.

The care label must be attached firmly to a garment, be easy to find, and readable for the useful life of the garment. Some garments have more than one piece. If the pieces are sold separately — or if they require different care — each must have its own label. Otherwise, only one label is necessary.

### What Should the Label Say?

In addition to giving one safe cleaning method, care labels must list any necessary warnings about that cleaning method. For example, the label must say whether any step of the care method — washing, bleaching, drying, ironing, or dry cleaning — could harm the garment, or other items cleaned with it.

### Does "Washable" Also Mean My Garment Can Be Dry Cleaned?

Not necessarily. Only one method of safe care has to be listed — regardless of how many other safe methods could be used. The label does not have to warn about unsafe cleaning methods. For example, clothing labeled "washable" may not dry clean well.

### What About Trim?

Care instructions apply to all permanently attached parts of the garment, such as buttons, lining, or decorative trim. Labels that say "Dry Clean Only, Exclusive of Decorative Trim" do not meet legal standards because they don't explain that the trim must be removed before the garment is cleaned, or give a separate care method for the trim.

## What If I Have Problems?

If you followed the washing instructions and your red-and-white shirt is now pink or if your garment was dry cleaned according to the care instructions and is damaged, return it to the retailer and ask for an exchange or refund. If the retailer won't cooperate, ask for the manufacturer's name and address, and write to the company.

In your letter, describe the garment and list information from the labels and tags. Estimate how many times you've washed the garment or had it dry cleaned. Include the full name and address of the retailer. Your letter may look something like the sample on page 6.

You also can contact the FTC by writing to: Consumer Response Center, Federal Trade Commission, Washington, DC 20580. Although the FTC can't resolve individual disputes, the information you provide may indicate a pattern of law violations requiring action by the Commission.

The FTC also would like to know if you've purchased clothing without a care label. Please include the name and address of the retailer and the manufacturer.

## Can I Remove the Label?







































Care labels must be attached when you buy clothing. The recommended care could influence your purchasing decision. For example, you may want to avoid "dry clean only" items if you're concerned about cleaning costs.

Although you can remove a care label, you risk losing important information about the proper care of your garment.

## For More Information

For a free copy of **Best Sellers**, a complete list of FTC publications, contact: Consumer Response Center, Federal Trade Commission, Washington, DC 20580; 202-326-2222, TDD 202-326-2502. Or visit the FTC at [www.ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov) on the Internet.

## \*Clothing Care Symbol Guide

| WASH  |   |   |   | WARNING SIGNS   |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| MACHINE WASH CYCLE  |   |   |   | WARMED BOMBS  |
|    |    |    |    |    |
| WATER TEMPERATURE   |   |   |   |    |
| Hot<br>(130°C/266°F)  | Warm<br>(140°C/284°F)   | Cold/cool<br>(120°C/248°F)  |   |   |
| BLEACH  |   |   |   | WARNING SIGNS   |
| BLEACH SYMBOLS  |   |   |   |    |
|    |    |   |   |   |
| DRY   |   |   |   | WARNING SIGNS   |
| TUMBLE DRY CYCLE  |   |   |   |    |
|    |    |    |    |   |
| HEAT SETTING  |   |   |   |    |
|    |    |    |    |   |
| SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS  |   |   |   |   |
|    |    |    |    |   |
| IRON  |   |   |   | WARNING SIGNS   |
| IRON -- DRY OR STEAM  |   |   |   |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| Low   | High  | Medium  | Low   |   |
| DRY CLEAN   |   |   |   | WARNING SIGNS   |
| DRY CLEAN -- NORMAL CYCLE   |   |   |   |  |
|  |  |  |  |   |
| PROFESSIONALLY DRY CLEAN  |   |   |   |   |
|  |  |  |  |   |
| Machine washable  | Steam cycle   | No steam setting  | Low heat  |   |

\* NOTE: The water temperatures listed on page 5 are provided as a guideline. Actual water temperatures obtained in the home depend on the washing machine settings (hot, warm, cold), regional water supply temperatures, and water heater settings.

## **Sample Complaint Letter**

(Your address)

(Your city, state, zip code)

(Date)

(Name of contact person)

(Title)

(Company name)

(Street address)

(City, state, zip code)

Dear (contact person):

On (date), I purchased (describe the garment) from (retailer's name and address). The care label indicated that (list information from the labels and tags). Unfortunately, my garment has been damaged because (explain the problem).

Therefore, to resolve the problem, I would like you to (state the specific action you want).

Enclosed are copies (copies, NOT originals) of my records (receipts, canceled checks, and any other documents).

I look forward to your reply and a resolution to my problem (set a time limit). Please contact me at the above address or by phone (home or office numbers with area codes).

Sincerely,

(Your name)